

**Victim Assistance in Western Sahara: then and now**

Western Sahara	1	2	3	4	5	6
According to original study		•		•	•	•
According to LM 2002		•		•	•	•
According to LM 2003		•		•	•	•

**Key Developments (LM 2002):**

Polisario states that it has not used antipersonnel mines since the 1991 cease-fire, and has no stockpile of mines. Polisario accuses Morocco of continuing to use mines. There have been no humanitarian mine action programs since May 2000.

**Indicator 1: The extent to which information on mine victims' demographics and needs is available.**

**According to original study:**

LM 2000 reports that 42 casualties were reported from Nov. 1999 to March 2000 in Western Sahara and that this is thought to represent an increase in accidents. The 2000 UN Portfolio of Mine-related Projects indicates that mine casualties, which have been limited so far, are likely to increase when 120,000 Sahrawi refugees and their families return to mine-affected areas. LM 2000 reports that the Saharawi Campaign to Ban Mines has begun a survey of landmine survivors, and identified about 360 amputees living in the four main Saharawi refugee camps, near Tindouf, Algeria. The majority of these amputees lacked prosthetics, while others had been using the same prosthetic device for ten years or more

**According to LM 2002:**

Polisario provided Landmine Monitor with a list of seven mine incidents from June 2001 to April 2002. Five involved antipersonnel mines, killing one person in 2001, and injuring one person and killing eight camels in 2002. Two involved antivehicle mines, injuring two people in 2001, and killing one person and injuring at least two others in 2002. The incidents took place in Smara (two), Farsia (three), Oum Draiga, and Mehairis.<sup>16</sup>

MINURSO recorded 39 mine incidents from 1992-2000.<sup>17</sup> A Moroccan organization named the Forum for Truth and Justice-Sahara Section has gathered information on landmine casualties in the Moroccan-controlled parts of Western Sahara. It states that there were a number of new landmine casualties during the reporting period, particularly among nomads in the southern part of Western Sahara.<sup>18</sup>

NPA conducted a mine victim assessment mission in the Saharawi refugee camps in April 2000, which identified 320 landmine amputees and another 300 disabled due to polio, and other reasons. A number of landmine survivors live in Western Sahara, on both sides of the berm, but no figures were available.

**Indicator 2: The extent to which a national disability coordination mechanism exists and recognizes mine victims.**

**According to original study:**

No information available.

**According to LM 2002:**

No information available.

**Indicator 3: The extent to which programs and services for the medical care and rehabilitation of mine victims are available.**

**According to original study:**

LM 1999 reports that medical facilities in Polisario-held territory are very limited. Each of the six military regions in Western Sahara has facilities at its headquarters to treat injuries. Surgical care is only available in the refugee camps in Algeria where there are two hospitals, between six to thirty hours away or more depending on where the accident occurs and what transportation can be obtained. In preparation for repatriation, Polisario has constructed two hospitals, one in Tifiriti in the north and the other in Mijek in the south. However, according to LM 2000, these facilities are not yet complete and require equipment and staffing. Rehabilitation facilities are reported to be almost non-existent except for a Military Rehabilitation and Education Centre located within the administrative centre of the camps, but facilities are extremely limited.

**According to LM 2002:**

Access to emergency services, especially in remote areas, is limited to military medical facilities. No NGO is actively working with landmine survivor assistance in the refugee camps or in Western Sahara.<sup>19</sup>

NPA prepared a proposal to establish a prosthesis workshop project in the camps and secured funding, but due to Algerian restrictions on visas to enter the region, the project was cancelled in early 2001. While the visa problems were solved in late 2001, neither NPA nor any other organization has gone ahead with the project yet.

The ICRC is developing contacts with representatives of the Polisario Front in order to sign an agreement regarding the fitting of lower-limb prostheses for Sahrawi refugees who are amputees at their center in Algiers.<sup>20</sup>

**Indicator 4: The extent to which programs and services for the social and economic reintegration of mine victims are available**

**According to original study:**

No information available.

**According to LM 2002:**

No information available.

**Indicator 5: The extent to which mine victims are protected and supported by effective laws and policies.**

**According to original study:**

No information available.

**According to LM 2002:**

No information available.

**Indicator 6: The extent to which there is a disability community advocacy network.**

**According to original study:**

No information available.

**According to LM 2002:**

No information available.

**Endnotes:**

<sup>16</sup> Polisario Response to Landmine Monitor, 27 June 2002.

<sup>17</sup> See *Landmine Monitor Report 2001*, p. 1063, for more detail. MINURSO has no full time mine action staff person responsible for maintaining and updating the landmine/UXO incident records. This responsibility lies with the MINURSO Force Training Officer, who is also the Mine Information Officer.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Brahim Noumria, Forum Verité et Justice- Section Sahara, Geneva, 8 April 2002.

<sup>19</sup> See also *Landmine Monitor Report 2001*, pp. 1064-1065.

<sup>20</sup> ICRC (Geneva), *Special Report, Mine Action 2001*, July 2002, p. 37.